

Annex 3

Haringey Council – Reserves Policy

Background

1. Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require local authorities to consider the level of reserves when setting a budget requirement. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer) to report formally on the adequacy of proposed reserves when setting a budget requirement. The accounting treatment for reserves is set out in the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting.
2. CIPFA issued Local Authority Accounting Panel (LAAP) Bulletin No.55, Guidance Note on Local Authority Reserves and Balances and Bulletin 13 (Local Authority Reserves and Balances). Compliance with the guidance is recommended in CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.
3. This note sets out the Council's policy for compliance with the statutory regime and relevant non-statutory guidance.

Overview

1. The Council's overall approach to reserves will be defined by the system of internal control. The system of internal control is set out, and its effectiveness reviewed, in the Annual Governance Statement. Key elements of the internal control environment are objective setting and monitoring, policy and decision-making, compliance with statute and procedure rules, risk management, achieving value for money, financial management and performance management.
2. The Council will maintain:
 - a General Fund general reserve;
 - a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) general reserve; and
 - a number of earmarked reserves.
3. Additionally, the Council is required to maintain **unusable** reserves to comply with accounting requirements although, as the term suggests, these reserves are not available to fund expenditure.

General Fund general reserve

4. The purpose of the general reserve is to manage the impact of emergencies or unexpected events. Without such a reserve, the financial impact of such events could cause a potential financial deficit in the general fund, which would be severely disruptive to the effective operation of the authority. The reserve should mitigate against immediate service reductions if there were any unforeseen financial impacts.
5. The level of the general reserve is a matter for the Council to determine having had regard to the advice of the S151 Officer. The level of the reserve will be a matter of

judgement which will take account of the specific risks identified through the various corporate processes. It will also take account of the extent to which specific risks are supported through earmarked reserves. The level will be expressed as a cash sum over the period of the general fund medium-term financial strategy. The level will also be expressed as a percentage of the general funding requirement (to provide an indication of financial context). The balance for 1 April 2026 is £15.2m,

HRA general reserve

The purpose of the HRA general reserve is similar to the General Fund general reserve above except applied to the ring-fenced HRA. The financial plan previously had a target to deliver an ongoing £8m minimum annual surplus however, this has become increasingly difficult to sustain due to the level of planned investment in existing stock and new build programmes that is required. However, the plan does achieve a positive revenue contribution to capital outlay (RCCO) for each year in the medium term while the HRA minimum reserve balance of £20m provides an appropriate level of financial cover, in recognition of the risks such as changes in government policies, operational factors and those associated with an extensive development programme.

Earmarked reserves

6. The purpose of earmarked reserves is to enable sums to be set aside for specific purposes or in respect of potential or contingent liabilities where the creation of a provision is not required or permitted.
7. Reserves fall into two categories – uncommitted reserves allocated to manage risks and uncertainties in respect of both expenditure and income and other reserves which are deemed as committed.
8. The Council will maintain the following earmarked reserves. **Risks and Uncertainties:**
 - a) **Labour Market Growth Resilience Reserve** - It is beneficial for the Council to support people into work, and this reserve will support activities which achieve that aim.
 - b) **Budget Planning Reserve** – This reserve is a key tool for managing the impact of financial plans from one year to another. This reserve requires balances to be at different levels year to year depending on the demand as identified through previous and current budget plans. It can also be used to support delivery of agreed savings.
 - c) **Collection Fund Smoothing Reserve** – As local tax revenue has become a more significant source of income for the authority over recent years, this reserve is a vital tool to smooth funding streams across the MTFs period. It will also be used to manage the profiling of when Section 31 grants and any surplus/deficits on the Collection Fund hit the Council's General Fund.

Contracts and Commitments:

- d) **Schools Reserve** - This balance represents the net balances held by the Council's 61 schools. The Secretary of State for Education allows Local Authorities to have within their Scheme for Financing Schools, a provision whereby surplus balances that are deemed excessive can be withdrawn from the school in question and applied elsewhere within the Dedicated Schools Budget.
- e) **Services Reserve** - It is Council policy that services may request funds to be carried forward, subject to approval by the Cabinet in the year-end financial outturn report. This reserve earmarks those funds to either be carried forward to the following financial year or retained.
- f) **PFI lifecycle Reserve** - The PFI reserve is ringfenced for using to fund future years' capital investment associated with PFI arrangements. The PFI arrangement ceased during 2025/26 although some outstanding commitments remain.
- g) **Debt Repayment Reserve** - this reserve represents funds the Council has set aside for debt related costs including the potential repayment of debt and for funding of future capital expenditure. It is planned to be fully drawn down during 2025/26 to offset in year borrowing costs.
- h) **Insurance Reserve** - The Council self-insures a number of risks including liability, property and theft. Insurance claims are erratic in their timings and so the Council maintains a reserve to smooth the charge to the Council's revenue account in the same way as a premium to an external insurance provider would smooth charges to the revenue account.
- i) **Unspent Grants Reserve** - This reserve holds grant income recognised in the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement (CIES) when received, but which will finance related expenditure in future years. These come with conditions setting out how the funding must be used.
- j) **Public Health Reserve** - This reserve was created during 2025/26 to hold any unspent Public Health grant not fully utilised in year which can be accessed in future years to manage any unexpected public health spending required. It was previously held within the Services reserve.

Management and control

- 9. The schools reserve and the insurance reserve are clearly defined and require no further authority for the financing of relevant expenditure.
- 10. The use of all other reserves requires budgetary approval in the normal way.
- 11. All reserves are reviewed as part of the budget preparation, financial management and closing processes.

Reporting and review

12. The regular Finance Update reports presented to Cabinet throughout each financial year will include relevant information on the reserve position.
13. The Council will consider a report from the S151 Officer on the adequacy of the reserves in the annual budget-setting process and the five year forecast position from 1 April 2026 is set out in Table 12 of Annex 1. The report will contain estimates of reserves where necessary. The Audit Committee will consider actual reserves when approving the statement of accounts each year.
14. The Council will review the reserves policy on an annual basis.